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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR OES/IHA, OES/PCI, NEA/IPA, NEA/RA AND EB/IPE
STATE PLEASE PASS TO USTR: ESAUMS
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SUBJECT: ISRAELI MINISTER OF HEALTH ON IPR ISSUES,
COOPERATION WITH NEIGHBORS

REF: TANSEY/COURY 2/8 TELECON

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador raised intellectual property concerns with newly appointed Health Minister Yaakov Edery. Edery told the Ambassador that he is working to establish a "green line" system for FDA-approved pharmaceuticals. The MOH is looking to renew its cooperative agreement with U.S. DHHS. Speaking personally, Edery said he believed that health cooperation with the Palestinian Authority (PA) should continue despite the Hamas parliamentary victory. Edery said the GOI would support PA President Abbas in the interim period preceding formation of a new Hamas-led government. Edery is also currently Minister for Development of the Negev and Galilee. The Ambassador suggested that U.S. technical agencies may be able to provide useful expertise towards the GOI's development plans. Edery expects Shimon Peres to resume charge of the Negev-Galilee portfolio following the upcoming Israeli elections. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Minister Yaacov Edery February 9. Edery was appointed as Minister of Health and Minister for Development of the Negev and Galilee in late January. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shared MOH's interest in renewing their cooperative agreement (Ref). He expressed appreciation for the responsiveness of MOH to the Embassy's questions about Israel's avian influenza preparations and the status of suspected cases. Edery said that the GOI had good cooperation with its Palestinian and Jordanian neighbors on avian influenza. He said he and his staff were also seeking ways to communicate with Lebanon and Syria on AI concerns. He noted the firm Roche had not given any Israeli firms permission to produce Tamiflu.

¶3. (SBU) Raising IPR issues, the Ambassador asked about the status of import licenses for American producers of food supplements and herbal products and whether the Ministry was receiving many requests to register new drugs following the adoption of marketing exclusivity legislation in 2005. Edery said that intellectual property protection was important to him personally, and volunteered that he had noticed some "absurd bottlenecks" since taking charge of MOH. He said that he wanted to establish a "green line" for drugs that had been certified by U.S. FDA or its EU counterpart. He agreed with the Ambassador's points that greater competition would expand treatment options and help to lower costs to consumers. The Minister promised to provide written reports on the processing of import licenses and drug registrations, and requested the Embassy's support for the "green line" initiative. He also said that he wanted to retain the Standards Institute as a public entity to protect IPR and resolve bottlenecks. He noted that the Finance Ministry was in favor of privatization. The Ambassador welcomed Edery's support on IPR, noting that the Special 301 review would take place in the coming months.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador asked Edery for his assessment of the likely effect of the Hamas election victory on Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on health concerns, including AI and cancer. Edery replied that the MOH had "always cooperated (in this sector) regardless of politics." His personal view was that cooperation should continue. He expressed surprise at the extent of the Hamas electoral success, but not at Fatah's poor showing, which he attributed to "corruption from all directions." Edery rued what he termed the absence of sufficient EU and PA supervision of financial resources, "most of which went to private individuals." If Hamas takes charge of the PA government, Edery recommends that donors fund projects directly, rather than through the PA. He expressed support for President Bush's stated position on Hamas, and said "we can't do anything with a group that will (take over) Tel Aviv, Haifa (Edery's hometown) or Akko." He said the GOI would support President Abbas with all possible assistance during the interim period preceding the formation of a Hamas-led government despite the attendant difficulty of doing so. "We want Abu Mazen to carry out what he says he will do. If he continues (in that direction), we will help him." Edery assessed, however, that President Abbas "wants to do many things, but can't do them." The Ambassador noted that most USG assistance went to specific projects carried out by NGO's, and reiterated U.S. policy on Hamas.

¶5. (SBU) On the subject of Negev-Galilee development, Edery repeatedly implied that he was holding the fort until Shimon

Peres could resume charge of that portfolio. Edery called Negev-Galilee "the future of the State of Israel" because it would allow Israel to continue to develop and to welcome more Jewish immigrants. The Ambassador cited the utility of public-private partnerships in developing the regions and suggested that the GOI raise money through investment vehicles in addition to public funds. Noting the recent visit by a U.S. EPA team to advise on the Ramat Hovav hazardous waste disposal site, the Ambassador said it could be possible to focus some of our bilateral cooperation on key regional development issues.

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JONES